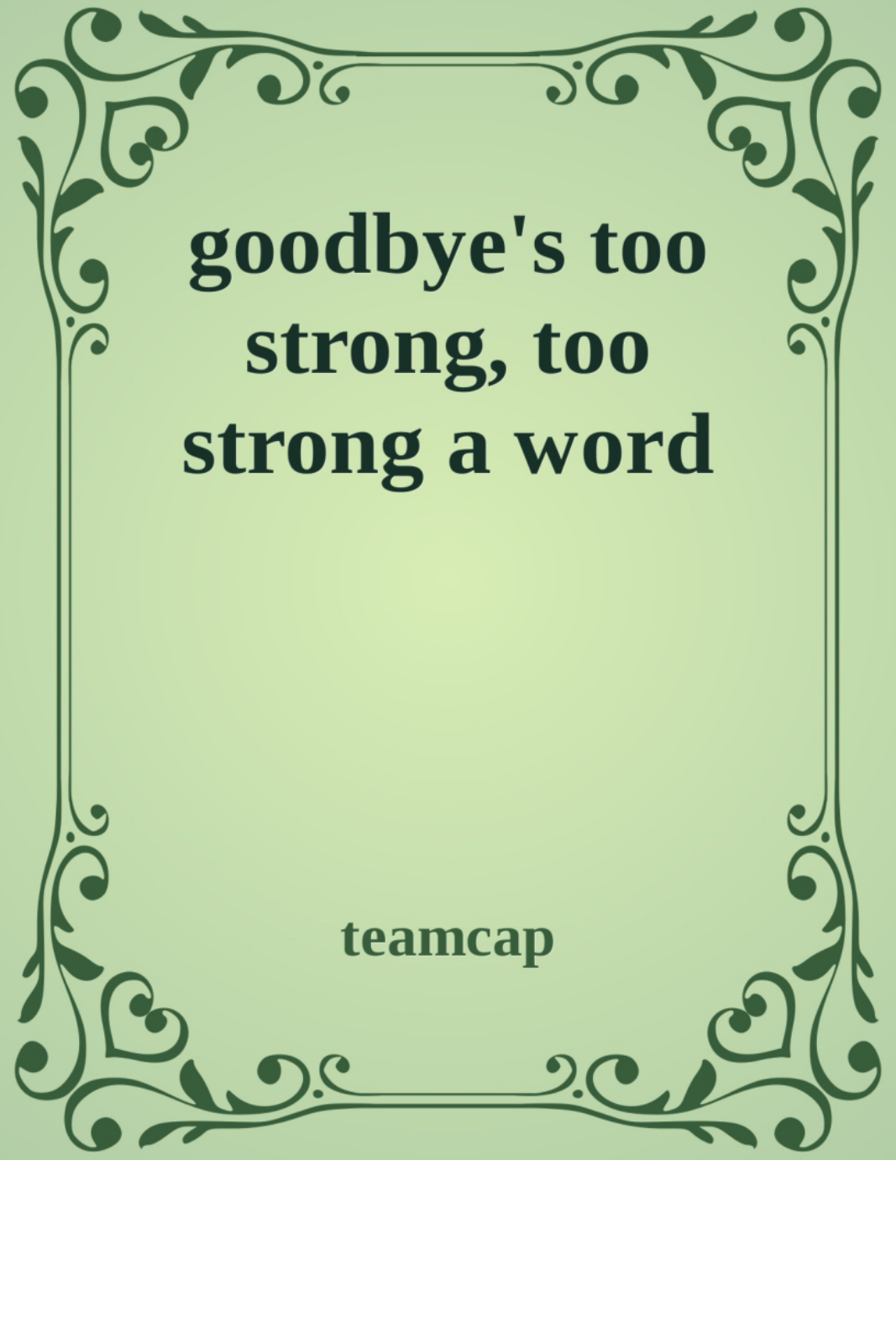


A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark green color, framing the central text.

**goodbye's too
strong, too
strong a word**

teamcap

goodbye's too strong, too strong a word by teamcap

Category: IT (2017), IT - Stephen King

Genre: Alternate Universe - College/University, Fluff and Angst, M/M, Mutual Pining, bill and ben and mike are only vaguely in this but i still love them, pennywise still happened but like he's dead fuck that guy and they dont rly remember so, richie is kind of an asshole but we still love him, stan and bev are the best best friends

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

Status: Completed

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Rating: Not Rated

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 1

Words: 10,550

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Summary:

"They all hug him, tight, as tight as they possibly can. Bill and Mike are crying, Stan chokes up saying goodbye. Beverly threatens his life if he doesn't call or send letters, Ben promises that they'll all save up money and come visit him. Richie promises letters and calls and tells them all how much he loves them, really does love them, and then it's Eddie. He doesn't say anything, pulls Eddie into his chest, as close as he can possibly get him. Eddie's arms are wrapped around his waist and Richie wants to live in this moment forever if he can. They don't let go for what seems like years in Richie's head, and then they do, and Richie decides it's the most wonderful time to do something very stupid. He leans in, a little, and kisses Eddie."

or

Richie moves across the country for college but he kisses Eddie right before he leaves and they don't know how to talk about their feelings

goodbye's too strong, too strong a word

Author's Note:

i made a playlist for this, which you can listen to [here](#). enjoy!

SEPTEMBER.

It's the beginning of September, and Richie is leaving Derry. He's finally getting out, just like he's always wanted, but his heart is staying behind.

Beverly is going to a school in Portland, living off campus with her aunt. Ben is going too, just like everyone kind of knew he would. Not because he has to, because he would do anything for Bev, and they all definitely know that. He'd follow her to the ends of the fucking earth if it meant he got to see her smile, so he's going to Portland and majoring in english and living with her. Sometimes Richie wishes he was a little more like Ben.

Mike is staying in Derry, going to a local school and helping on the farm. Thinking about Derry makes Richie think about summer and a missing brother and a broken arm and Stan's scars, and he doesn't really understand that. Thinking about *staying* in Derry makes him feel like he's suffocating. He's always said he would leave, get out and never come back, but now he thinks there might be a reason to. The town doesn't feel like home, it never has, but Mike does. And that's enough.

Stan is going to the University of Massachusetts, three hours away, not too bad. A respectable distance away, but still close to everyone else. Almost. Stan, Richie thinks, needs to get away from Derry more than anyone. He has scars on his face that his hair covers now, he doesn't mention them, no one asks. He and Bill have talked about it, Richie is sure, because Bill needs to leave too. He isn't, though, not really. Two hours, University of Maine. Eddie is going too, they're rooming together, and Richie is thankful for that. They're gonna need

each other, he thinks, but some part of him wishes he was living with Eddie. Pipe dreams, that's what he tells himself. Because Richie is *leaving*. He isn't going with Bill and Eddie - he almost had, really, but he has to get away. He knows that. He has to get away from the voice in his head and the feeling in his chest when he sees Eddie. It's occupied his thoughts since he was fourteen, and he can't think about it, not now, not anymore, never again. And he will, he's sure, but he convinces himself that a bit of distance will help.

No one has really mentioned him going to college for the past few weeks. Not because he isn't going - he got into almost every school he'd applied to. Five schools had accepted him, University of Maine included, and he'd chosen the one on the other side of the fucking country. Berkeley, in California, because of course he would, and he knows. Richie knows that no one mentions it anymore because they're a little upset and a little scared for him and a little worried he'll go and goddamn fall in love with the west coast, never to be seen again. And so he's spent his summer trying to calm them all down, joking about being worlds away from everyone else, and maybe it hasn't helped very much or any at all but it's all he knew how to do. He would try for the rest of summer, he would try forever if he thought it would make everyone feel a little lighter about the whole situation. Summer, though, is coming to an end.

It sneaks up on them, the end, and suddenly it's Richie's last night in Derry. The seven of them are piled into Bill's living room, because it wouldn't make sense to be anywhere else. It had been normal at first, truth or dare, a movie, whatever. They stop a few hours in because it feels a little too much like a party and they don't really have anything to celebrate, not when Richie is moving across the country sooner than any of them are really ready for. It's four hours in when Bill grabs some shit out of his parents' liquor cabinet and they all start drinking it, but Richie doesn't. He wants to remember this, looks around the room and tries to take it all in. They're all laughing now - something Bev said, he thinks, but he doesn't really know. And this is what he wants. This moment right here, not when they were crying earlier and talking about how much they were going to miss him, he wants this, for as long as he can have it. His friends laughing, the smiles on their faces, Eddie pressed into his side and still trying to get a little closer.

Eddie.

Richie doesn't know exactly what to do about Eddie. He sort of attached himself to Richie as soon as they got to Bill's, and he's been pressed up against his side ever since. And they've always had some kind of unspoken thing between them, and this is a little bit different, but it still makes Richie's head spin and his heart drop into his stomach when Eddie wraps an arm around his waist. He tries not to think about it. It doesn't really work, because Eddie doesn't move from his side for the rest of the night. They stop drinking, they turn on a movie, they all settle in. Eddie stays as close to Richie as he can possibly get. He looks a little like he might start crying at any moment, he's looked a little like that all night, but Richie doesn't say anything. One by one they drift off, Stan first, and then Bill and Ben, then Mike. Richie and Bev talk for a little while, avoiding anything about planes or tomorrow or only a few more hours, and she eventually falls asleep, and then it's just Richie and Eddie. Richie and Eddie. One word, he thinks. Usually one word but especially tonight. Eddie is still sitting against his side, head on Richie's shoulder. They're kind of holding hands but not really. Richie doesn't understand that. He opens his mouth to say something - what, exactly, he doesn't know - but he stops. Eddie's body is shaking a little, he has his hand over his mouth. Richie doesn't check to see if he really is crying. He doesn't want to know. If he sees Eddie crying he thinks he might never leave.

Maybe that wouldn't be so bad, staying with Eddie forever.

"Eds," he whispers. Eddie sits up a little, but he doesn't say anything. Richie thinks Eddie is trying to steady his breathing, and he speaks before his brain can come up with a reason not to. "Do you need your inhaler?"

"Don't call me that," Eddie says finally, and Richie smiles a little. "I don't need it. I don't have it with me, anyway."

"I have one," Richie says. He takes Eddie's hand, for real this time, and squeezes a little.

"Still?"

“Yeah.” Eddie squeezes back, and Richie turns so he can see him better. “Why are you crying?”

“You’re leaving. In a few hours you’re gonna be on your way across the fucking country and no one seems to be bothered by it.”

“You are.”

“I’m gonna miss you.”

“Yeah? Your mom is gonna miss me too, I bet. What’ll she do without me in her bed?”

“God, you’re so fucking gross,” Eddie says, rubbing at his eyes. He smiles, just a little. “Why am I gonna miss you so much?”

“That’s just the Tozier charm, Eds, what can I say?” Richie squeezes his hand again. “I’m gonna miss you too, you know that.”

“Yeah? You aren’t gonna forget about me?” Richie thinks he tries to play it off as a joke, but it doesn’t quite work.

“Eddie baby, I could never forget about you,” Richie whispers. He knows he’s pushing it with baby, just a little, but Eddie doesn’t fight it. “You’re my favorite.” Eddie moves back again, leans against Richie’s chest. Richie moves his free hand to Eddie’s curls, presses a damn kiss to the top of his head because that’s just how he is around Eddie, he’s come to find out.

“Call,” Eddie mumbles. “As soon as you get there you have to call, yeah? Let me know you didn’t fucking die or something. We can’t afford a funeral.” Richie smiles.

“Who needs a funeral? Just bury me at sea, lad,” he says in his very best impression of a viking, but he doesn’t really know what the fuck a viking sounds like.

Eddie squints up at him. “That was awful. I’ve changed my mind, I can’t wait for you to leave. I’ll never have to hear your terrible voices again.”

“Yeah, you will,” Richie says. “I’m gonna call, remember?”

"You better." They talk all night about everything except leaving and fall asleep an hour before they're supposed to get up. They all pile into Bill's car the next morning, shove all of Richie's shit into the back, and drive to the airport. It's real then, and Richie is a little excited but mostly terrified. He doesn't tell anyone this, but they know anyway. If he and Eddie hold hands the entire time, no one else mentions it. Richie spends a lot of the time waiting thinking about doing something very stupid.

His flight is boarding before he knows it.

They all hug him, tight, as tight as they possibly can. Bill and Mike are crying, Stan chokes up saying goodbye. Beverly threatens his life if he doesn't call or send letters, Ben promises that they'll all save up money and come visit him. Richie promises letters and calls and tells them all how much he loves them, really does love them, and then it's Eddie. He doesn't say anything, pulls Eddie into his chest, as close as he can possibly get him. Eddie's arms are wrapped around his waist and Richie wants to live in this moment forever if he can. They don't let go for what seems like years in Richie's head, and then they do, and Richie decides it's the most wonderful time to *do* something very stupid. He leans in, a little, and kisses Eddie.

Not really, not an actual proper kiss like the one he's imagined before, but a kiss nonetheless. Sweet, quick, pressed to the corner of Eddie's mouth. It feels a bit like coming home and a bit like jumping off of a cliff without knowing what lies below. When he pulls back Bev is giving him a look, something between 'you have the world's worst timing' and 'say something to him'. Eddie is staring at him, tears are pooling in his eyes. Richie turns on his heel and walks to the gate. He wants to turn around, he knows he should turn around, so he doesn't. There are tears running down his cheeks and he wipes them away as discreetly as he can.

Richie gets on the plane, fiddles with the bracelets on his wrist. He does his very best to ignore the ache in his heart that's big enough for six people to sit inside of.

OCTOBER.

Autumn in California is warmer than Richie is used to, and it almost makes him miss Maine. Almost, but not quite, because he can't miss what makes his insides twist and his throat close up. He doesn't want to miss it.

He misses his family.

Not his parents, not really. Bill and Stan, and Mike. Ben and Beverly. Eddie, especially, more than anything. He thinks about them every fucking day, all the time, and his chest hasn't really stopped aching since his plane took off a month ago. Richie has tried to settle in at college, and he has, just a little. He's sort of friends with his roommate, Alex, and Alex's friends Lynn and Justin. It isn't the same though, not really. Not at all.

Richie hasn't called yet.

It sits in the back of his mind all the time, promising them phone calls and letters. Words to Eddie, whispers in the dark about not forgetting. And that's just the thing - he hasn't forgotten, he *can't* forget, but he can't call, either. Because his entire fucking being *hurts* whenever he thinks about them (all the time), because he misses them so much that he can't think about anything else, because he thinks calling might make everything worse. It'll make it worse for him, make the distance that much fucking harder. And he thinks if calling will make them miss him as much as he misses them, make them hurt that much, it isn't worth it. So he doesn't call.

As it turns out, not calling doesn't really work either. Richie stops ever really leaving his dorm unless he's going to work or his shitty part time job at the record store down the street. He only talks to Alex, maybe Lynn or Justin if they're hanging around, but he doesn't talk as much as he probably should. And he doesn't ever explain the situation to them, but he thinks they might have an idea.

It's been a full month before he knows it. A month since he saw his best friends, talked to them, hugged them. Kissed them, maybe, just a little bit. He sort of feels like an asshole for that, and he thinks he deserves it. Richie spends the whole damn day inside, doesn't even go to class, because he feels so fucking lost without them there. Feels a little like he might break at any moment. It's late in the afternoon

when Alex gets home, shoves Richie's phone into his hand and tells him he isn't allowed to leave until he talks to whoever he misses so much. Richie is sort of grateful for him and sort of wants to punch him in the face. He doesn't do anything for a few minutes, and then goes to call Eddie. Except he remembers the conversation and the kiss and he goes back, picks someone else. Stan picks up after three rings, just like Richie knew he would. "Hello?"

Richie can't answer immediately. Hearing Stan's voice makes the ache worse, makes him think of his best friends and the distance in between them. The emptiness in his chest that he's spent the better part of a month trying to ignore is more noticeable than ever.

"Hello?" Stan says again. Richie lets out a breath.

"Hey, Stan the man, what's crackin'?"

"Richie," he says, sounding a little shocked. "You haven't called. We were worried."

"Worried about little ol' me? You sure know how to make a girl blush, dahlin'," Richie pulls a fucking voice, because of course he does. He hates himself a little.

"You haven't called," Stan repeats.

"Yeah," Richie says quietly. "I'm, uh, kind of an asshole."

"No shit," Stan says, and Richie thinks he might be smiling. It makes him feel closer despite the three thousand miles in between.

"I'm just, fuck," Richie mumbles. "I think I hate it here. Every damn day so far I've woken up and gone to sleep thinking about how much I miss you guys. And how much I miss Eds, y'know, how much of a shit I was to kiss him at the airport and leave without saying anything. Who does that?"

"You."

"Yeah," Richie hums. "I don't know what I'm doing."

"None of us do." That makes Richie feel a little bit better but also not

any better at all.

"I feel like such a dick," Richie says. "God, I just. I kissed my best fucking friend because I've been in love with him for years, right? Everyone knows that. And I just left. I left. What the fuck? And, like, I haven't even talked to him since then. It's like... it's like fucking what happened on Monday or whatever."

"What?"

"The Breakfast Club, y'know. Like, everyone knows that Claire and Bender like each other. And they do, and they kiss, but they don't talk about it. Maybe nothing happens on Monday. Maybe nothing is supposed to happen! No one fucking knows."

Richie knows that if he were there in person, Stan would be rolling his eyes. He probably is anyway. "That doesn't make any sense, Rich. Like, that's not even kind of the same thing."

"It's close enough."

"You haven't called him." It isn't a question, and Richie hates Stan for just a second.

"I don't want him to miss me. I don't... if I call him I don't think I'll be able to stop calling him. I'll want to hear his dumb voice all the time. Obviously. And I'd rather him not miss me at all than call him every five minutes because that's how often I think about him. Every five minutes."

"Eddie misses you whether you want him to or not, Richie. We all miss you, I miss you, and I'm glad you called me. It's annoyingly nice to hear your voice again. But please call Eddie. You need to call him and tell him everything you just told me. I'm three hours away from him and days away from you. I can't fix it for you." It makes sense, all the sense in the fucking world, really. Stan is so damn sensible that Richie hates him for it sometimes, but he also doesn't hate him at all.

"Okay," is all he can get out, mostly because he's trying not to cry.

"Okay. Call the rest of us too, yeah?"

"Yeah," Richie says, and it's a promise. "Thanks, Stanny. I knew I could count on you. I'll call. I love you."

"Love you too, Richie," he says, and the line goes dead. Richie takes a minute to get himself together before he presses the phone to his ear again. Bev picks up almost instantly.

"Hello?"

"Bev," is all he says, then sucks in a breath and prepares for what he knows is coming.

"Richie Tozier, you goddamn asshole," Bev shouts, but she's also kind of whispering. He thinks it's appropriate.

"I know, I know."

"You better have a damn good explanation for why you've been gone for a month and you're only calling now, or I swear to whatever god is listening I will come to California and kick your ass." He believes her.

"I wish I had something great to tell you, Bev. I'm just kind of awful."

"And a dick," she adds, a bit muffled. Talking around one of the cigarettes they used to share, probably.

"That too."

"What's wrong?" She asks, and before he can say nothing she adds, "I know you. Something is wrong."

"I, uh, I think I hate it here a little bit. I miss you guys, mostly. Like, my roommate and his friends are alright. Classes are alright. Got a job or whatever. But I miss you guys."

"We miss you too, you know that. Don't act like you don't, okay, you know how much we love you."

"Why I am honored, miss, truly," he says, kind of the British guy but not really.

"California hasn't made your voices any better, I guess. Consistency is key. Have you called Eddie?" She asks, and Richie knew this was coming.

"No," he says. Bev hums in acknowledgement, but says nothing. "You know I'm in love with him, right?"

"Yeah, we all do. Maybe not Eddie."

"Do I tell him?"

"Depends."

"On?"

"Whether or not you want a short and very, very angry boy showing up at your dorm in the next week. You kind of fucked up, Richie, kissing him and all right before you moved across the country."

"Yeah, obviously."

"I'm sure Stan already told you that you need to call him-,"

"How did you know I called Stan?" Richie asks, but he doesn't really need to.

"I know you. Don't interrupt, this is important. It took Bill days to get Eddie out of the house after you left. I don't know what you guys talked about, or if you talked about anything at all, but he's fucking sad and college is only kind of distracting him." Richie understands that. "You need to talk to him."

"You're too damn smart for your own good, Bev, you know that?"

"And you're an idiot. But you're kind of in love with someone who's a few thousand miles away, so I can forgive that."

"Means the world, Ringwald," Richie mutters, but he's smiling a little more than he has since he moved. "Thanks for just, generally being a much better person than I am."

"Anytime," Bev laughs. "And Rich?"

“Yeah?”

“If there isn’t a letter with pictures in my mailbox by the end of next week I really will come out there and kick your ass.”

Richie laughs, actually laughs, for the first time in a month. “I know you will. Love you, Marsh.”

“Love you too,” Bev says, and hangs up. It takes Richie fifteen minutes to get himself together, and then he gears up all the damn courage in his body and tells himself he can do it. He tries his very best not to cry while he dials Eddie’s number, and it almost works. Eddie picks up after five rings.

“Hello?” He says, and his voice is so small and sleepy that Richie really does start crying. His heart hurts, his entire body hurts like it’s trying to pull itself closer to Maine.

“Hey, Eds,” he whispers, he fucking whispers, because everything feels so breakable.

“Richie?”

“Yeah.”

“You didn’t call. You said you were gonna call,” Eddie says, and Richie really wants to go back in time and talk some sense into himself.

“I know, baby, I’m sorry. I was being stupid. I should have called you as soon as I got out here, just like you asked.” Richie’s doing it again, pushing his luck with the pet names, but Eddie doesn’t mention it.

“Yeah, you should have. I miss you, Rich.”

“I miss you too, Eds. So much. Every fucking day.”

“Don’t call me that. I thought you forgot,” Eddie whispers. “About me.” And that’s it, apparently, all Richie’s heart can take, because he swears he feels it fucking shatter in his chest.

“No, love, never. I told you I could never forget about you. You’re my favorite.”

“Good. You’re mine, too,” he says, and Richie blushes like he’s some movie cliché. They talk for what feels like hours, talk about everything. Almost. Eddie yells at Richie for a few minutes, because he deserves it, and Richie says more apologies than he knew he had in his body. Eddie doesn’t ask about the kind of kiss, so Richie doesn’t bring it up. If Richie closes his eyes, he can almost imagine laying on Eddie’s roof with him and talking about everything, sometimes looking at the stars and maybe holding hands but definitely not talking about it. Almost perfect, almost everything he wants, and so far away. When they run out of things to talk about, Eddie asks, “When are you coming home?”

“Not until Christmas, probably.”

“Oh.”

“I would come sooner if I could.”

“I know,” Eddie hums. “I just want to see you.”

“Understandable,” Richie says, “I am pretty irresistible.”

“Shut up, I hate you,” Eddie giggles a little, and it makes Richie smile. “I’m expecting you to call at least once a week now, I hope you know that.”

Richie throws a hand over his chest in feigned shock even though Eddie can’t see it. “Once a *week* ? I’m wounded, Eds. I hope you like hearing my voice-,”

“I don’t,” Eddie lies. Richie ignores him.

“-because I’m calling you at least once a day from now until I come visit.”

“Hm, okay,” Eddie says. “You better. Goodnight, Rich.”

“Night, Eds,” Richie half-whispers. “Love you.”

“Love you too, Richie. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.” They hang up, and Richie feels so fucking light, feels like he could maybe do anything. He goes to sleep feeling much less empty than he has since he’s been

there. The next day he calls everyone else, and then Eddie, and he calls Eddie all the days after that, too.

DECEMBER.

Richie flies back to Maine in the middle of December, right after finals. It's colder than he remembers, but he feels so fucking warm being in the same place as everyone else. Bev and Stan practically tackle him the second they see him, Mike actually lifts him off the ground. He sees Eddie then, drops his bag and runs full speed and picks him up and spins him around in the middle of the airport and holding him like that feels just like he knew it would. Bill drives them all to Richie's house and he says hi to his parents, picks up some extra clothes and tells them he'll see them later in the week, and then they drive to Bill's. He's already told his parents that the seven of them are taking over the house for the next week and a half, and Richie is thrilled. So they spend the week going between the arcade and the Aladdin and Bill's house, and Richie hasn't felt this damn happy in months.

He and Eddie are sort of attached at the hip the entire time, and maybe they sleep right next to each other, maybe they hold hands. No one mentions it if they do, no one asks any questions. Bev gives Richie these looks, and he knows that she knows, but he doesn't do anything about it. Because Eddie is his best friend and Richie is a little in love with him and he doesn't feel like ruining anything right now, not when everything feels so nice for the first time since September. Of course, because he's Richie, and because the universe is never really on his side, he doesn't get to forget about what's sitting in the air between him and Eddie all the time. They're three days away from him leaving when it hits him in the fucking face, because of course it does. They finish another round of truth or dare and he goes out on Bill's back porch to smoke - Eddie gives him a look, but doesn't stop him. It's cold as shit because he's unfortunately used to the weather in California, and he isn't wearing a jacket, so he lights his cigarette, sits down, and wraps his arms around himself as tightly as he can. Richie hears the door slide open, doesn't look up. He knows it's Bev before she sits down next to him, and he holds his cigarette out as a peace offering, because he knows what she's about to say.

"Thanks," she smiles, takes a drag and hands it back. "You don't have a jacket on, you're gonna freeze to death."

Richie rolls his eyes. "Thanks, mom. Eddie was cold."

"You haven't told him yet." There it is. Exactly what Richie was expecting. He doesn't say anything. "Why haven't you told him, you dumbass? It's been months."

"Oh, yeah, let me just drop it into the conversation. Real casual. Hey Eds, how did your finals go? By the way, I've been in love with you since we were thirteen, just in case you didn't know. Think that'll work?"

"Obviously not," Bev says, leans back on her elbows. "You're gonna have to talk about it, you know. An actual conversation. About feelings."

Richie wrinkles his nose and puts the cigarette out on the side of his shoe. "Gross. Don't see the point, Bev darling. He doesn't feel the same anyway." Bev scoffs, actually scoffs at him.

"Have you been paying attention at all? Eddie would have never let you go this long without bringing up the kind of kiss if he didn't feel the same way." Richie groans and drops his head forward.

"There you go again, Marsh, being too smart for your own good."

"What would you do without me?"

"Live a nice life where I don't have to face my problems," Richie mumbles.

Bev gets up from where she's sitting and walks over to the door, then turns to look at him again. "Even if I'm wrong, even if Eddie doesn't feel that way about you, you have to tell him. This is killing you, Rich, you look fucking miserable." Richie nods, gets up, and follows her inside. And she's right, he knows, because she always is. He doesn't tell Eddie that night, though. Not the day after that, and not the day after that. And then Richie is leaving again, flying back to California until June. Bill drives them to the airport again, and it's a little harder this time, but a little easier, too. The goodbyes are teary,

Bev hugs him until he can't breathe, and he promises letters and phone calls and they all know it's for real this time. And then it's Eddie. Again.

Richie doesn't really think about it this time. He pulls Eddie as close to himself as he can, holds him for as long as he can get away with, lets go even though he doesn't want to. Eddie is crying, just a little, and so is Richie, and then Richie leans in. Another kiss, to the corner of Eddie's mouth, sweet and soft, and Richie only thinks about how right it feels and the thousands of miles that will be between them soon. He steps back, doesn't look at Bev because he can feel the anger radiating off of her. Grabs his bag, goes to the gate, gets on the plane. He calls Eddie the day after he lands, and every day after that. Richie thinks about the kiss, doesn't mention it. Eddie doesn't ask.

SEPTEMBER.

Richie flies back at the very beginning of June. The hellos are sweet, they make Richie happy, they make his heart feel so *full*. He spends the entire summer in Derry, kind of lives with Bill but goes between all of their houses and his own. And it feels right, going between the arcade and the quarry and the barrens, feels like it always has. Like he's home. Not in Derry, but with them. He and Eddie spend most of the summer together, stuck to each other's side, and Richie had sort of expected it but is a little surprised nonetheless. They don't talk about the kisses. Plural.

Richie leaves again at the beginning of September. It's his last day before any of them are really ready for it, and Bill drives them all to the airport. Routine. They wait around until his flight is boarding and then the goodbyes start, tears and hugs and promises to call. Stan hugs him last, tight, and then it's Eddie. It's always Eddie, probably always will be. Richie knows that.

It happens, same as always. Richie pulls Eddie as close as he can - if Eddie nuzzles into his neck a little bit more, he doesn't say anything. Richie steps back and looks at him. He has a fleeting thought that Eddie is the most beautiful person he's ever seen, and then he leans in. His lips against Eddie's, a little more than usual, a little longer. When they pull back, Richie's brain sort of freezes. He forgets to turn around right away, and Eddie is crying, so Richie puts one of his

hands on Eddie's cheek and wipes away a couple stray tears. Pulls him in again, kisses his forehead. And then he grabs his bag, turns, walks to the gate and gets on the plane. Routine.

He does write, and he calls. Calls all of them, calls Eddie. Every single day he calls Eddie, but he doesn't tell him. Richie spends most of the month, and the month after, and the month after that freaking out about this situation that is entirely his fault. Because he knows how he feels about Eddie, he's always known, and everyone else knows. But Eddie doesn't know. And now this has been going on for a year, this kind of kiss, not quite goodbye *thing*. It hurts a little more every time, it's a little more real every time. Because they never talk about it, not ever. Richie calls Eddie every single day, and they almost always cry, and it's all a little too much for just best friends. The pet names that Eddie doesn't fight, how quiet and small Eddie's voice is when he says how much he misses Richie. It's all a little too much. It makes Richie's head spin, mostly because he doesn't know what it means. He knows what it means to him, he knows he's in love with Eddie, but he doesn't know what any of it means to Eddie. For some reason, though, he can't bring himself to ask.

"You're so dumb, Richie," Stan says into the phone one day. It's the end of November, and it's the millionth time Stan has told Richie the exact same thing. "You're never going to stop freaking out over this if you don't get your shit together and talk to Eddie about it."

"Stan the fucking man, do you even know how terrifying it is to think about telling your best friend that you're in love with him when you don't know if he feels the same way?"

"Yes," Stan says flatly, and Richie rolls his eyes.

"Yeah, well, that's different. You and Bill have been so obvious for years."

"More obvious than you and Eddie?" Stan asks, affronted. "You're kidding. Listen, Richie, you just have to do something. Bill won't tell me anything because it's Eddie's personal business or whatever, but my best guess is that Eddie has been head over heels in love with you for years. So just... do *something*. The rest of us are sick of being mediators."

"I'm offended," Richie says, but he knows Stan is right. And then he thinks of something. Not a perfect plan, but something that'll maybe work. He runs it by Stan, who says it's pretty good, and then Bev, who tells Ben, and they both agree. Richie thinks, for the first time, that maybe he can actually do this.

DECEMBER.

Richie heads back to Derry four days earlier than originally planned, right after his last final. Beverly picks him up at the airport and they drive around for a few hours until Bill calls, lets them know that he just left the dorm and they should be good to go. She drives him out to Bill and Eddie's school, gives him an encouraging smile but also threatens to kick his ass if he fucks this up, and then she's gone. He's only been to the campus once, so it takes asking a few people for directions, but he ends up outside the building soon enough. Walks in, up the stairs, stops outside the door. He knocks on it lightly and smiles when he hears Eddie mumbling nonsense on the other side. The door opens, and Richie is sort of taken aback, because he had almost forgotten how damn beautiful Eddie is. He doesn't have much time to think about it, because Eddie *throws* himself at Richie, wraps his arms tight around him and buries his face in Richie's chest. "Hey, Eds."

"Don't call me that," Eddie mumbles, but Richie can feel him smiling. "You aren't supposed to be here yet."

"Well, Eddie Spaghetti, I am a man of many talents, including surprise visits!" Richie does his best British guy, though a bit muffled from where his face is pressed against Eddie's curls.

Eddie steps back and wrinkles his nose. "Your voices are still awful. I'm disappointed." Richie throws his head back dramatically and pretends to stumble back, smiles when he hears Eddie's laugh.

"I'm wounded. I simply cannot go on, not when my Eds is disappointed in me."

"Beep beep. What are you doing here?" Eddie pulls him into the room and shuts the door.

“Well, I thought I’d come spend some quality time with ya, baby,” Richie says, as jokingly as he can. He thinks Eddie blushes a little, but he doesn’t say anything. “I just missed you. I mean, I know I was gonna see you anyway, but we don’t get much time just the two of us. And you’re my favorite, remember?”

They bundle up and spend the day walking around the campus - Eddie shows Richie where his classes are, his favorite places to hang out, the best coffee place the school has. Richie switches between having his arm around Eddie’s shoulders and holding Eddie’s hand and it feels so fucking right that Richie doesn’t ever want it to end.

“You’re so cold,” Eddie says that night, curled into Richie’s chest. They squeezed into Eddie’s twin bed and it’s a little tight but Eddie is so close that Richie can’t complain.

“Good thing I have my own personal heater,” Richie smiles, pulls Eddie even closer, and, yeah, this is pretty much all Richie could ever want. They spend the next two days between Eddie’s dorm and the town. Eddie shows him all his favorite places, and Richie pulls him closer when he says all the places are better with Richie there. Everything feels so wonderful that it gives Richie a new wave of courage and something in him kind of clicks, and he knows.

It’s their last day together before they’re driving to Derry to be with everyone else. They shop in town for a while, get dinner at Eddie’s favorite restaurant - not a date, Richie tells himself, but pays anyway. It’s late when they get back to the dorm, and they collapse onto Eddie’s bed, kind of on top of each other and all in each other’s space. Richie looks at the little plastic stars stuck to Eddie’s ceiling, and something about it feels so comforting that he thinks it’s probably as good of a time as ever.

“I got asked out,” he says bluntly. He curses himself because he hadn’t really intended to lead with that, but now he has to. He feels Eddie shift to look at him. Richie looks at the ceiling, the little stars. “A few days before I left. Someone asked me out.” Eddie tenses.

“That’s, uh.” Pause. Richie is quiet, uncharacteristically so, because this is fucking important. “That’s great, Rich. I’m happy for you.” Eddie gets up, stands next to the bed. Richie moves then, sits up. He

wants to grin, but he doesn't. Eddie isn't looking at him.

"Eds, c'mon," Richie whispers. "Turn around." He does, and he looks like he's trying hard not to cry. Richie feels a familiar ache in his chest.

"I'm happy for you," Eddie says again. "I just thought, um. Nevermind. I'm happy for you."

Richie smiles softly, takes Eddie's hand and pulls him closer so he's standing between Richie's legs. Richie looks at him and his heart hurts, in a good way, because he loves Eddie so fucking much. "I said no," he whispers. "I turned 'em down, Eds, told them I have a boyfriend in Maine." Eddie giggles so softly that Richie almost misses it.

"That's very forward, isn't it? I don't remember being asked out."

Richie grins. "Who says I was talking about you, Eds?"

"Right, of course," Eddie says, nodding. His hands move to cup Richie's face. "I forgot about your years-long crush on Mike."

"Don't leave me hangin', baby," Richie says. "Was I right about the boyfriend thing? Do I?" He moves his hands down to Eddie's waist. Eddie doesn't say anything, just leans in and kisses him. Full on, not like the airport kisses. The way they should have been kissing for years, Richie thinks. When they stop to breathe, Richie leans his forehead against Eddie's. "I love you so much, Eds," he breathes out. "I have for years. You know that, right?"

"We're so stupid," Eddie says. "I love you, too. Obviously." He kisses Richie again, so soft that he thinks he might die, and it feels like coming home. The same feeling he has when he always sees Eddie, the fucking *warmth* or whatever. And Richie thinks that maybe home isn't a place, but a person, a short one with curls and an inhaler he doesn't really need, with plastic stars on his ceiling and a scar on his palm that matches Richie's. He doesn't know how it got there, not really, but he knows that for him, Eddie is home.

Leaving is much harder this time. They spend the next week and a

half with everyone else, though they almost never leave each other's side. And then they're back in the airport, and Richie's plane is leaving soon. The same goodbyes, same promises. He holds onto Eddie longer than he usually does, lets go, kisses him. It's different this time, a real kiss. The reality is sinking in now, that they can't be near each other every day, that they only have phone calls. Richie hates it. They're both crying a little and Richie whispers an 'I love you' and squeezes Eddie's hand before he turns to leave. He gets on the plane and he feels a little like his heart is breaking in his chest, and he has a feeling in his gut that he can't understand, like nothing will be quite right anymore. Richie tries his best to push it aside, ignore it. It doesn't work, just feels like it's getting worse the further he is from Eddie.

MARCH.

As it turns out, the feeling in Richie's gut was right. It's the middle of March, now, and maybe definitely the worst semester of Richie's life. It's been pretty awful since he got back, because he misses them all so much, misses Eddie so much that his heart hasn't stopped aching since his plane took off. And there's been a little voice in his head, quiet and nagging, telling him that this won't work. He tries to ignore it. He can't, though, not really. Because he thinks it might be right.

They call every single day, at first, just like usual. It isn't quite the same, because hearing Eddie's voice and not being able to hold him makes Richie kind of feel like he's dying. He goes out during his first week back after one particularly heartbreaking call with Eddie, one of the ones where they both just sort of cry and say how much they love each other. And Eddie feels so far away that it hurts Richie's entire being, so he goes out, goes to the store and buys two packs of little plastic stars. He sticks them up all over the ceiling above his bed, and Alex laughs, but Richie doesn't care. And when he calls Eddie, he lays down and looks at them and thinks about the ones Eddie has in his room, and it makes Richie feel a little closer. At first.

The phone calls cut to just a few times a week after that. Richie is taking more classes, and Eddie gets a job at the coffee place on campus that he loves so much. Shorter calls, fewer calls. And it's fine at first. Then they call once a week, when Richie joins the drama club at school, and then even less than that. And the little voice in Richie's

head freaks him out, tells him that maybe Eddie will find someone in Maine. Someone a little more convenient than thousands of miles away, a little more convenient than three months a year.

At first, Richie doesn't listen. He knows how much Eddie loves him, knows how much he loves Eddie. But they haven't talked on the phone in two weeks, and maybe the voice is right.

Richie spends most of March in his room. Alex gives him these looks, but doesn't say anything. Richie is grateful for that. He goes to class, comes home, repeats. And he hates himself a little, kind of a lot, because he's pretty sure this is all his fault. Because he was the one who started kissing Eddie at the airport, and he was the one who kind of asked Eddie out, and because he was the one who went to school on the other side of the fucking country.

He, of course, tells Bev and Stan, who, of course, tell him he's being ridiculous. He can't bring himself to believe them. So he spends March in his room, sometimes crying, looking at dumb pictures of him and Eddie or letters Eddie has sent him, tracing the words *love*, *Eds* with his finger. Stopping because they look too pure for him to be anywhere near. He looks at the plastic stars with tears on his cheeks and he thinks about taking them down but he never does. He decides that even if Eddie finds someone better in Maine, maybe they can look at the same dumb plastic stars, even if Eddie doesn't know. It doesn't make him feel any better. Nothing really does.

APRIL.

April, Richie decides, is the worst month of the entire year. He spends most of it in his dorm, goes between doing homework and wallowing in self pity. He spends some time wondering if Eddie has found someone else yet, all the way in Maine, and hates that there isn't really much he can do about it if he has. It's the middle of April when Eddie calls.

"Hi Rich," Eddie says, and Richie notices right away that his voice is different than usual. Just a little bit sad. "I'm sorry I haven't called in a while."

"No worries, Eddie Spaghetti," Richie says. "I haven't either. I guess

we've both been pretty busy."

"Yeah," Eddie mumbles. They sit in silence for a minute, and Richie kind of can't take it.

"Eds," he says, softly. "Is something wrong?"

"I don't know." Eddie sounds so far away, and Richie looks at the little plastic stars, but it doesn't help. "Am I crazy, Rich, or is this not working how we want it to?" And there it is. Richie feels his heart break in his chest.

"Maybe not," he speaks quietly, tries not to sound too choked up. "I want it to work."

"So do I," Eddie whispers.

"Is this, I mean," Richie stops. If he says it out loud, it's real. "This kind of sounds like we're breaking up."

"I don't want to," Eddie says, and Richie can tell he's crying. He almost reaches an arm out to pull him in, and then he remembers. "I love you so much, Richie. Maybe we just aren't supposed to do this right now. Maybe later, when we're done with school."

Richie rubs away the tears on his cheeks. "Yeah, maybe."

"If you want to, um," Eddie stops, takes a deep breath. "If you get asked out, you don't have to tell them you have a boyfriend in Maine."

"What if I want to?"

"Richie-,"

"I know. Okay, yeah. You too, but California. Obviously."

"Richie?" Eddie says, small and far away.

"Yeah, baby?" Richie says it out of habit and he hates himself a little. "Sorry."

"It's okay," Eddie assures. He still sounds a bit like he's crying. "I love you. You know, more than anyone."

"I love you too, Eds. You're still my favorite."

"Okay," Eddie says. "Bye, Rich. I'll see you when you come home." Richie doesn't say anything else, because he's crying so much that he can't, just waits for the line to go dead.

Richie quits his job the next day, only leaves his room to go to class for the next two weeks. After two and a half weeks, he bumps into the guy who asked him out all the months before. Isaac. He asks Richie out again, and Richie says yes, just to see. They go on one date, to some shitty restaurant. Isaac kisses him in his car and Richie feels like he's gonna throw up. He says maybe when Isaac asks about a second date and runs up to his dorm faster than he ever has, gets in his bed and calls Bev. He tells her about the shitty date and how much his heart hurts and how he feels like he can't breathe anymore which is fucking stupid because he doesn't have asthma, Eddie does. And because Bev is an angel, she calms him down and listens to him cry for a half hour.

"Hey," Bev says quietly, before she hangs up, "you're not gonna feel so sad forever, you know. One day you'll feel like you can breathe again."

"Yeah?" Richie mumbles. He looks at the stars on his ceiling and the nauseous feeling comes back.

"Yeah," Bev says. "I promise." Richie believes her, a little, but he's tired of promises. He keeps looking at the plastic stars. When Bev hangs up, he gets out of bed and takes them all down, but he doesn't throw them away.

MAY.

Richie's routine mostly stays the same through May - he gets up, goes to class, comes home. He barely talks to Alex. He calls Bev sometimes, and Stan, but not really anyone else. And he's sort of accepted it as his life, now, wake up and go to class and go home. If he cries, Alex never says anything. Richie is grateful.

He doesn't go on any other dates, and no one asks him. He tries not to think about the plastic stars and the letters with the loopy handwriting sitting at the very back of his desk drawer.

Stan calls him halfway through May, and Richie almost doesn't pick up, but something in his fucking heart tells him he needs to. He hates that.

"Hey, Rich," Stan says when he picks up. "Listen, we're all here except Eddie and I really need you to agree to be quiet and listen to us before we start talking because this is really important."

"What?" Richie asks. "What do you mean you're all there?"

"All of us," Bev's voice crackles through the phone. "Like, all of us. But not Eddie."

"Remember when I told you that I'm three hours away from him and days away from you so I can't fix your shit?" Stan asks.

"Yeah," Richie says.

"Looks like I have to fix it anyway. We're all gonna talk now, so just. Don't say anything, okay?"

"Yeah, fine," Richie mumbles, "whatever."

"Yuh-you need to talk to Eh-Eddie," Bill says bluntly. "He's muh-muh-m- fuck. He's ruh-really upset."

"And so are you," Bev adds.

"We know you guys broke up, but we just think you need to talk about it. You were both so happy when you got together," Mike says, voice of reason.

"We aren't trying to force you together if you really aren't meant to be together," Stan says. "We just think you would be better off if you talked about it."

"It did sort of seem like a rash decision," Ben adds. Richie hates all of them for a second, because he knows they're right.

“Have any of you talked to Eddie about your brilliant idea?” Richie asks, but there’s no malice in his voice. He can’t be mad when he’s pretty sure he has the greatest damn friends in the entire world.

“Bill has,” Stan says. “But he won’t tell us anything.”

“I don’t know, guys,” Richie says. “He broke up with me. Well, it was sort of mutual, but whatever. What if we were right?”

“Richie,” Bev speaks up. “I swear to God, I’ve never seen you as happy as you were with Eddie. And you know what? Maybe you aren’t meant to work out. But you don’t know that. What’s the point of being unhappy and waiting around to see if you work years down the road when you could just fucking be happy right now?” They go in circles for an hour until Richie decides that fuck it, he’ll have the biggest damn heart to heart with Eddie when he goes home at the end of the month. They’re all thrilled, and he gets a little sappy telling them how much he loves them.

Richie feels a little better after their intervention, feels a little bit closer to breathing again. He leaves his room more than once a day, even hangs out with Alex and his friends once. He’s starting to feel a lot better the closer it gets to the end of the month. It’s a week before he plans to leave for the summer when Bev calls.

“Hey,” she says when he picks up. “Ben and I sent you a package. Did you get it? It should have come by now.”

“I haven’t checked,” he says, getting off the bed. “I’ll call you back if it’s here, yeah?”

“Sounds good,” Bev says, and hangs up. Richie grabs his room key and walks out, goes downstairs and around to the side of the building where the mailboxes are. And then he stops dead in his tracks.

Eddie is standing there, in one of Richie’s old hoodies, bag in hand, and Richie has never seen something so beautiful. He’s standing still in his place until Eddie smiles, and then he runs forward and grabs him around the waist, spins him around and makes Eddie shriek.

“Rich!” He yells, grinning wide. “Put me down!” Richie obliges, but

immediately pulls him into the tightest hug he possibly can. He smells like mint gum and shampoo and *Eddie* , and Richie kind of feels like his heart is going to burst.

“What are you doing here?” He asks finally, hands on Eddie’s shoulders, keeping him there but also kind of making sure he’s real.

“Bill talked some sense into me and I was gonna wait until you came back to talk to you but I couldn’t,” Eddie says quickly. “I missed you too much. God, what were we thinking?”

“I have no idea,” Richie says, and then he goes for it, leans in and kisses Eddie. It feels better than he ever thought it could. Eddie responds eagerly, wrapping his arms around Richie’s neck. They separate after what feels like forever but also feels like not nearly enough time. Richie picks him up, insists on carrying him bridal style to his dorm despite Eddie’s protests. Alex is there when they go in, and he gives Richie a thousand watt smile.

“Alex, this is-,”

“Eddie Spaghetti?” He guesses, and Eddie shoots daggers at Richie. “I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“You *asshole* ,” Eddie says. “You call me that to *strangers* ?” Richie grins, wraps his arms around Eddie from behind and rests his chin on top of Eddie’s head. And he’s so blissfully fucking happy that he’s pretty sure nothing could ever ruin it. Alex totally vacates, spends his last night bunking with Lynn and Justin before he heads home for summer, so Richie and Eddie get the dorm to themselves. Richie gets Eddie to help him finish packing, because Eddie is much better at it than he is, and then they spend the week going around campus and around town. Richie shows him the record store and his favorite restaurant and the best places on the campus and when they get tired they curl up in Richie’s tiny bed. Richie relearns some things that he almost forgot, like how soft Eddie’s curls are and how much Eddie likes it when Richie kisses down his jawline. Richie thinks it’s the best week of his entire life.

“Hey,” Eddie whispers. It’s the night before they’re flying back to Derry, and they’re curled up on Richie’s bed, holding hands in the

dark. "I don't want to ruin a good thing, but we haven't really talked much about what happened."

"Yeah," Richie says. "You go first."

"Sure," Eddie giggles, curls closer to Richie. "Well, I certainly don't plan on losing you again, so we have to work around the whole living on opposite coasts business."

"Communication is key," Richie mumbles sleepily.

"What are you, a relationship counselor?"

"Obviously." Eddie laughs, and then they actually talk. They talk about it for hours, and it's almost a fight, but not really. Richie tells him that he was so worried about Eddie finding someone else that he couldn't breathe, and finds out that Eddie was worried about *Richie* finding someone else in California. Both of them yell a little and cry a little and then they kiss a lot, so Richie figures it went pretty well. Richie falls asleep telling Eddie how much he loves him and how he can't wait for school to be over so they can move somewhere and be together forever. Eddie smiles, tells him that he's so dumb but he can't wait either, falls asleep with his head nuzzled into Richie's neck. They fly out the next day, and they hold hands the entire way to Derry.

SEPTEMBER.

Richie has the best summer of his entire life, despite being in Derry. The seven of them spend every day of the summer together, go between Bill's house and the arcade and the quarry even though they aren't really kids anymore. Richie sneaks into Eddie's window at night like he used to when they were in middle school and Eddie laughs every time. They drive up to Portland a few times to see Bev's aunt and get a change of scenery, and Richie thinks that these are the greatest times of his life. Of course, having Eddie pressed into his side all the time certainly helps with that.

The end of summer seems to come more quickly now, and before Richie knows it, it's his last day in Derry again. This, he thinks, is the hardest one yet, and his heart aches while Bill drives them to the

airport. A little because he's going to have to adjust to life without them again, and a little because Eddie has been in a weird mood for the last few days, has kind of been in it all summer, like he has some secret that he's barely keeping to himself. Richie asks constantly, and Eddie keeps saying nothing is wrong. He practically bounces the entire drive over, and Richie's heart kind of drops into his stomach because he thinks maybe Eddie is thrilled to see him go. He still has the look though, like he has something he can't wait to say. Richie doesn't say anything, because he sort of has his own thing to worry about, and is sort of trying hard not to talk himself out of it. Mike and Ben start pulling Richie's bags out of Bill's car when they park, and Richie is tempted to tell them to stop, is so tempted to stay here with them forever. It isn't until they're inside, waiting for his flight, that he notices the extra bags. He turns to his friends, opens his mouth to ask why he suddenly has two times more luggage than usual, but they all have this fucking look and he doesn't know what it means. Richie turns to Eddie, who looks kind of excited and also kind of like he might throw up. "Eds," he says. "What's going on?"

"Okay, listen, don't freak out," Eddie says. "I'm, uh. Kind of coming with you." Richie wants to say something, but all of the words have been sucked out of his body, so he just stands there, staring at Eddie. "I applied to transfer over the summer because I really loved the school when I came to visit you, and they have my major, and it's a really good program. I loved it, and I love you, so much, and I want to be closer to you but I wasn't gonna ask you to stay in Maine. I don't really want to be here anyway, not without you. So I applied, and I got in. And I sort of requested you as a roommate, and we owe Alex big time because he helped me fake your paper and request me. So. Yeah." Richie opens his mouth to say something, but he can't. He sees Eddie start to freak out before Eddie even says anything. "Oh my God. Fuck, okay, this was so stupid. Oh my God. Please don't be mad."

Richie snaps out of it then, lunges forward and scoops Eddie up in his arms and spins him around just like he always does. His heart is bursting from his chest and he can't even speak for a minute because he's so overwhelmed, so happy. "Oh my God," he says finally. "Eds, this is perfect. I love you so much." He kisses him right there in the airport, and Eddie smiles so wide that it makes Richie feel like he can

do anything. And then he remembers his own kind of secret, and figures that he might as well do it now. "I love you," he repeats. "This, uh, makes mine a little less surprising after your grand gesture, but. No point in waiting, now, right?"

He kneels down, then, and he doesn't fall and make a fool of himself like he thought he would. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the ring - it isn't nearly what he thinks Eddie deserves, and he promises himself he'll replace it later, but Stan had sworn up and down that Eddie would love it. Eddie sucks in a breath and Bev is whispering frantically behind them and Richie kind of really needs Eddie to say something.

"But we're so young, Rich, are you sure?" He asks finally. Richie laughs a little, stands up, and reaches for Eddie's hand.

"So, I've, uh, been kind of in love with you since we were thirteen and definitely in love with you since we were sixteen. I've never been sure about anything except that, y'know? Not my family or school or a career or whatever else. But, God, I've always been sure about you. It's like you're this constant in my life. Even if you aren't there, you are, with the phone calls and letters and the little plastic stars. And I'm not saying we have to get married tomorrow or anything, but you're it for me. I don't want to say goodbye to you anymore. You're my forever, I think. I know I want to marry you. Not right now, or tomorrow, or whatever, but someday. Unless you want to get married tomorrow. Whenever you want. I just want to be with you, Eds."

"Don't call me that," Eddie says, and he's crying. He launches himself at Richie, wraps his arms around his neck as tightly as he can and Richie is crying too. Their friends are cheering, and Stan might be crying, just a little. Ben and Mike certainly are, Richie knows. When Eddie lets go, Richie slides the ring onto his finger. It fits perfectly and Richie sort of feels like everything aligns in that moment, his entire universe. Because Eddie is his entire universe. The others wrap them up in a group hug and walk them to the gate and the goodbyes are longer than usual. They're all crying by the end, and a tiny part of Richie still wants to stay, but he can't without Eddie. Their flight is called, then, and they get on the plane. Richie leans over when they take off, presses the softest kiss to the corner of Eddie's mouth, but this one isn't a goodbye. Not even close.

It's the beginning of September, and Richie is leaving Derry again. This time, though, his heart is going with him.

Author's Note:

i'm @lesbianallymadej on tumblr if you ever wanna talk to me about my fics or about these dumb kids.
thanks for reading!